

**Vocation . . .  
our mission  
in life**

- What does the word *vocation* mean to you?
- A divine calling?
- A fulfilling occupation?
- Sharing your special talents to help others in need?

The word *vocation* comes from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning “to call.” And the word *mission* comes from the Latin word *missum*, meaning “sent.” One definition of mission is “a special task to which one devotes one’s life; a calling.”

Could our vocation, then, be our mission in life?

Here at Divine Word College, vocations are central to our mission as the only Roman Catholic college seminary in the United States devoted to the education of missionaries. We also recognize the many other important ways that vocations are fulfilled: by living Christ-like lives through the sharing of our time, resources and talents; by promoting vocation awareness in students as they consider their own futures; and through selfless service to others in places where the need is great.

In this issue of *The DWC World*, we explore and celebrate vocations.

*Huy Khanh Tran*



**Huy Khanh Tran**

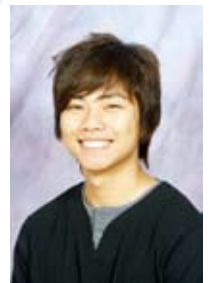
“Being or becoming someone is a vocation,” says Huy Khanh Tran, who graduates from Divine Word College this month. “It is how I respond to God’s call.” He also feels that balance between communal and personal, academic and formational, and social and private areas has helped in his discernment. “The vocation of an SVD missionary reflects this balanced state of life.”

“When people ask me why I came here,” Tran says, “I tell them that why I am staying is more important than why I came.” During his years at DWC, Tran feels that he has received many blessings. “I vow to return those blessings and to make others feel blessed as well,” he explains. “My focus now is to get ready for my novitiate year at Techny; I like to take one step at a time.” As he moves on to the next phase of his vocational journey, he has this advice for others considering seminarian life at Divine Word College: “This place called DWC may be cold in the winter, and the air filled with the smell of fertilizer in the hot summer, but it will change your life in such a way that you will never imagine. It will give you an open perspective and an open heart, a sense of self-awareness and self-realization. Best of all, it will give you a ton of friends, buddies and brothers. And you will find that your life belongs to something bigger.”

*Nathaniel Minh Nguyen*

“For me, vocation means more than just a calling,” says Nathaniel Nguyen, Brother candidate at DWC. “It is a deep yearning in one’s heart to pursue a mission greater than one’s self.” His interest in life as a Brother was sparked by his volunteer service during his high school years in Lincoln, Nebraska. “As a Brother,” says Nguyen, “I can dedicate my whole self to service while witnessing to Gospel values. That’s what led me to Divine Word College in the fall of 2004.”

Since then, Nguyen has had many opportunities for service through community ministry and serving migrant workers while in Japan on overseas study. “These experiences have strengthened and deepened my yearning to become a person of service, a religious Brother, and to live out my life for others.” This May, Nguyen graduates from the University of Dubuque with Bachelor’s degrees in Communication and Religion. “I hope to continue my journey to the Brotherhood and aspire to serve in the area of education,” he says. “I believe that education is one of the most important gifts of service one can give to the world today. For through education, we can reshape the world into a more loving and caring place.”



**Nathaniel Nguyen**

*(continued on page 2)*

**A Word  
from  
Fr. James  
Bergin, SVD**

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Scripture provides many dramatic “vocation stories” as God enters the lives of people with a very clear call. In *Genesis*, God calls Abram to leave his homeland for a land which God will show him, eventually changing his name to Abraham. In *Exodus*, Moses experiences the presence of God in a burning bush and hears God’s call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Jeremiah tries to refuse God’s call to be a prophet, arguing unsuccessfully that he is too young and does not know how to speak. In the gospels, Peter, James, and John suddenly leave their families and their fishing to follow Jesus. Saul, a relentless persecutor of the disciples, becomes Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, after being knocked to the ground as he experiences Jesus in a blinding light and a voice from heaven.

Our vocation stories, I suspect, are less dramatic, with no burning bush or blinding light or voice from heaven. But as we grow in the gift of faith, we realize that Jesus is also calling each of us by name, inviting us to use our gifts and interests to follow Him in service to our sisters and brothers. This basic baptismal call to service continues to unfold as we listen to Jesus speaking deep within us, with an invitation to married or single life, religious life, or service as a deacon or priest. However we live out our baptismal call to follow Jesus, we know it will involve concern for others, especially people most in need, as we use our talents to serve the Reign of God.

This issue of *The DWC World* provides several vocation stories, describing how people are living out their call to follow Jesus. Vocational discernment can be a long process involving prayer, reflection on our gifts and interests, awareness of the various ways of being disciples of Jesus, and sharing our journey with a spiritual director or another trusted person. At times we might wish for a voice from heaven to clarify our call, but we know that discernment involves a patient, prayerful listening to how Jesus is leading us.

I am very grateful for the deep sense of peace and fulfillment I have experienced as a Divine Word Missionary. I am also aware of the ongoing discernment even after the initial vocational choice. For religious missionaries that discernment involves discussion with our religious superiors as we balance our own interests with the needs of our religious community.

I am happy that my vocational journey led me back to Divine Word College this past January after being away since 1990. I am the new Rector of the religious community, a position I also held from 1987 to 1990. In the fall I will return to teaching here as well. For the past nine years I had the privilege to be the Novice Director at Techny, Illinois, walking with young men who were discerning a call to be Divine Word Missionaries.

The mission of Divine Word College is to provide the environment where young men can begin that discernment which may lead them to the novitiate and to profession of vows as Divine Word Missionaries. We hope that the academic and spiritual formation they receive, and the experience of living in a community enriched by a diversity of cultures, will prepare them well for service to others as followers of Jesus, however their vocation story may unfold. We appreciate our friends and benefactors who support us in our efforts to provide the environment for this vocational discernment. Please join us in praying that more young people will respond to God’s call to service as Divine Word Missionaries and in other forms of ministry in the Church.

**Fr. Paul LaForge, SVD**

“To me, vocation is an inner emotional urge in the beginning,” says Fr. Paul LaForge, SVD. “As time goes by, the urge is felt as an impetus to serve God. *How* remains cloudy, but gradually clears into a certainty that God wants me for a special purpose and a unique task.”

Not many people know more about the fulfillment of one’s vocation and the utilization of one’s talents than this nontraditional 2009 DWC graduate. In fact, LaForge has redefined and enhanced his vocation throughout his entire life as an SVD missionary. As he graduates this month with his second Bachelor’s degree, at the young age of 78, he recalls a history of 73 continuous years in the classroom as student, teacher, and sometimes both. Forty-one of those years were spent teaching in Japan. In addition to earning two Masters’ degrees, LaForge holds a 3<sup>rd</sup> class Black Belt in Kodokan Judo and has taught Tai Chi and Yoga. Along the way, he also discovered the artist within him and is accomplished in the Sacred Art of Iconography, as well as Japanese and Russian art techniques. “Art is an effective way of communicating the Gospel message as a Divine Word Missionary,” he says.

Will he slow down anytime soon? “I’m devoting my later years to the mastery of digital equipment,” he says. “This is my chance to recall the Divine Presence in the present and to surrender the future to the goodness of God. Farewell to the classroom and onward with learning!”



**Fr. James Bergin, SVD  
Rector**

(continued  
from page 1)



**Fr. Paul LaForge, SVD**

**Vocation  
Office  
sponsors  
Mission Trip  
to  
Jamaica**

This year's *Mission Experience Trip to Jamaica* brings together a diverse group of volunteers who realize the true meaning of vocation. Among the participants are several college students, a retired widow and a man discerning his call to the priesthood. From May 24 through June 1, the team will work among the poor in southeast Jamaica as part of the second Jamaican Mission Trip sponsored by the DWC Vocation Office.

"In terms of vocation, this ministry fulfills the mission and vocation of the Society of the Divine Word," says Fr. Joseph Chau Nguyen, SVD. "We are an international religious group, reaching out to all the people in the world, especially the poor and homeless." Nguyen will accompany this year's mission group as its spiritual leader. "When I accepted this responsibility," he says, "I recalled the year 2005 and Hurricane Katrina, when I assisted homeless refugees in Louisiana. In like manner, I can open myself up to the experience of Jamaica and help those who are the 'least in society' there." New to his role as a



**Fr. Joseph Chau  
Nguyen, SVD**

Vocation Director at DWC, Nguyen explains, "This trip will be a good opportunity for me to experience the mission field. I will see how the people live and help them while immersing myself in their culture." During his seminary years Nguyen developed a hobby as a magician and often performs at college events and for other occasions. "I will do magic tricks for the children in Jamaica," he says. "This experience will enrich me in my vocation ministry and I can inspire young people that I talk to, encouraging them to help and serve others."

### *Participants share their vision of vocation*

Mission trip volunteers will assist the Divine Word Missionaries in their day-to-day ministries while living and working with the Jamaican people. Activities will include building a house; painting; ministering to youth, adults, the elderly and homebound; helping with food distribution; and assisting at schools.

Lia Canavan, a college student from New Jersey and one of the 2009 mission trip volunteers, says, "My Catholic faith is the strongest force in my life. It is my true desire to help and minister to those in need through serving in Jamaica." Danielle Clemente, another participant, has served as a volunteer and a catechist. She also participated in a foreign exchange program while in high school. Clemente explains, "This trip will allow me the opportunity to help others by improving their living conditions and by sharing with them elements of my Catholic faith through word and example." Stephen Hill is currently discerning his vocation to the priesthood. "In the seminary, I learned how to appreciate, respect and love all kinds of people and cultures," says Hill. "I see everyone as a masterpiece of God's love. Our job as missionaries is to make sure that all can experience this love, and I'm grateful to God for blessing me with the opportunity for this mission trip." Nicole George, a graduate student from Michigan, feels that she will grow in her relationship with God during this mission experience, by serving those on the fringes of society. "I want to learn about ways to bring Christ to those in need," she says.

Perhaps most poignant of all is the story shared by a retired woman who is also participating in this year's mission trip. "In the span of a year," she says, "I lost my husband of 33 years, my sister, my mother and also a dear friend – all in addition to the near total destruction of my home by Katrina." Yet, even when she was angry and despairing, she felt as though someone was carrying her along. "Family, friends and complete strangers helped and prayed for me," she relates. "Now, it is payback time for me. I want others who are hurting or lacking to know that there are people in this world who do care."



*Photos from 2008 Mission Trip to Jamaica*





Mr. Mark Singsank  
VP for Development

“Vocation:” a call, summons or impulsion to perform a certain function or enter a certain career, especially a religious one.

Regardless of what career path we choose in life, we have all been called to a vocation. Some people know from an early age what they want to do with their life. Others may never have one specific career they want to pursue; they are content changing careers every few years.

All of our students have been called to a religious vocation. Some have already decided that religious life is indeed their final vocation. Others are still in the discernment process, listening to God’s call to see if life as a priest, Brother or Sister is truly for them.

During their vocational journey here, our students rely on the support of our benefactors to help them. Because of you, Divine Word College is able to assist our students with room and board, tuition, books and medical insurance costs. For many years, your support has helped young men attend Divine Word College and go on to their final vows in religious life.

One such young man is Deacon Linh Pham, SVD, a 2003 graduate who will be ordained on May 23. After several Masses of Celebration, Fr. Linh Pham, SVD, will join our Development Office this summer as the Associate Development Director for Vietnamese Outreach. Fr. Linh will replace Fr. Thu Pham, SVD, who will be moving on to a new ministry. Both of these young men have heard the call to religious life and will serve God in ministries selected for them. Your support of their vocations has been an integral part of their success.

Thank you so much for your generosity and kindness toward our students. Please continue to pray for them and for more vocations to religious life. Remember that you’re always welcome to stop in and visit us.

**Have you remembered Divine Word College in your estate plans? All bequests to Divine Word College help with scholarship support for our seminarians. If you would like more information about making a planned gift to Divine Word College, please contact Mark Singsank at 563-876-3353 or [singsank@dwci.edu](mailto:singsank@dwci.edu). You can also visit our website at [www.dwci.edu](http://www.dwci.edu).**

Memorial and tribute gifts offer an opportunity to honor a relative, friend or business associate for any special occasion: birthday, anniversary, promotion or a particular accomplishment. The memorial gift also provides a thoughtful and appropriate way to express timely sympathy and future remembrance. You may send memorial gifts to Divine Word College, P.O. Box 380, Epworth, Iowa, 52045-0380.

Memorials have recently been received in honor of:

Thomas Beaudoin  
Lois Gruel

Thelma Horan  
Linda Sieverding

Mercedes Singsank  
Allen C. Tressel

Yvonne Wolbers  
Ralph Zaug

On May 16, 2009, four men graduated from Divine Word College: Fr. Paul LaForge, SVD, Binh Nhat Nguyen, Binh Thanh Nguyen and Huy Khanh Tran. LaForge, Tran and Binh Nhat Nguyen received their Bachelor of Arts degrees in Cross-Cultural Studies. Binh Thanh Nguyen received his Associate of Arts degree in Cross-Cultural Studies.



Tran has applied to the Novitiate for the fall of 2009. Binh Thanh Nguyen plans to continue his studies as a Brother candidate.

We congratulate this year’s graduates and offer them our prayers and support as they continue to follow their vocational paths.

**Memorials**

**Class of 2009**

## Matthew 25 Award

Mary  
"Cookie"  
Scherrman is  
2009 Award  
Recipient

by Nathaniel  
Nguyen



Mary  
"Cookie" Scherrman

On Wednesday, March 18, 2009, family and friends joined Divine Word College in honoring Mary "Cookie" Scherrman as the 2009 recipient of the Matthew 25 Award – presented annually to someone engaged in front-line ministries with the "least among us" in the spirit of the gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 25. Award recipients minister among immigrants and refugees, street people, AIDS victims, inner-city youth, prisoners – all those who live at the margins of our society and still lack a public voice.

Divine Word College president Fr. Michael Hutchins, SVD, says, "The Divine Word College community looked forward to this year's Matthew 25 Award celebration with special anticipation. We were delighted to recognize Ms. Cookie Scherrman, someone who epitomizes all that the Award represents, humble and enabling service to those in need."

For over two decades, Cookie Scherrman of Dyersville has been living the Gospel of Matthew 25 as she reaches out to the hungry, thirsty and less fortunate around her. Her introduction to pastoral ministry came in 1984, when the pastor from St. Francis Xavier Church knocked on her door. "He asked me if I would serve on our parish Social Concerns Committee," she recalls. "The Dyersville Food Pantry, established in 1986, was our first project." A combined community and parish effort, the pantry now serves 10 rural communities surrounding Dyersville. Scherrman is also involved in ministry with the Catholic Worker House in Dubuque, which supplies meals to people in need.

In 1990, St. Francis Xavier initiated a project delivering medical supplies and money collected from the parish to Holy Cross Parish in Fonds Verettes, Haiti. Since then, Scherrman has gone to Haiti many times. The group's volunteers often include students from Beckman High School in Dyersville, as well as Scherrman's own grandchildren. "These trips give students an opportunity to experience life in Haiti, and to learn that we must help, love, care and pray for one another in whatever ways we can," she says. "Young people are our hope for peace in the world."

The parish team goes to the poorest areas of Haiti and receives the warmest welcome. "Despite their poverty and struggles against natural disasters, the people have the greatest resiliency and love," she says. Upon their arrival in Haiti, the group and its supplies are usually picked up by friends from the parish. Squeezed in next to supply boxes, they endure a long ride on bumpy dirt roads to Fonds Verettes, a place of "abject poverty," according to Scherrman. "I asked myself, 'How can they live here?'" Some of the problems in Haiti include malnutrition, lack of education, unemployment and a significant discrepancy between the rich and the poor.

A typical day for the group begins with a walk up the hill to morning Mass in the chapel, followed by hugs and greetings. A simple breakfast gives the team energy for morning activities like delivering medical supplies to the area clinics. They also visit other villages and schools, offering the group's students an opportunity to see firsthand how the people live. They keep journals to reflect on their experiences, and to share later with family and friends at home. "In our daily evening discussions, we talk with one another about how we each saw Jesus in the people we met that day," Scherrman explains. "Prayer and community are my source of energy. I believe, also, that we can achieve peace through education."

She feels that the Haitian people live life to the fullest, showing Christian values in their welcoming hospitality and zest for life. "They give us so much that I often feel undeserving. Haiti doesn't need me as much as I need Haiti."

When she returns to the States, Scherrman often experiences reverse culture shock. "It's hard to believe that we live with many basic things that our Haitian friends will never have: a water faucet, a comfortable bed, a refrigerator full of food, smooth roads and sidewalks. Even though we have these material comforts, we don't always live a fulfilling life."

Hope is the driving force behind her continued efforts to show God's love to the world. "Receiving this award is a very humbling experience because no one person does all these projects alone," Scherrman says. "I feel blessed to belong to a parish that helps in so many ways. And my husband and family are supportive of the things that I do, helping me to remain enthusiastic. To be Christians, we have to have hope."



L-R: Fr. Mark Weber, SVD, Cookie and Donald Scherrman and Fr. Mike Hutchins, SVD



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## Divine Word College

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*Fr. Alejandro Mumenthey speaks to students about the SVD*

“Learn, listen and proceed in love . . . you are the future of the Catholic Church.” In his opening prayer, Fr. Bill Shea, SVD, set the tone for the second annual 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Vocation Awareness Day, held at Divine Word College on Tuesday, March 10. Exuberant students gathered on the campus for a day of song, prayer and learning.

Sponsored by the Dubuque Archdiocese Vocation Association (DAVA), the event was attended by all seven Catholic elementary schools in Dubuque County. Over 300 students participated, along with 17 vocation directors, 13 teachers, 19 volunteers and three parents.

Len Uhal, Vocation Director at Divine Word College, and Sr. Roberta (Bobbi) Bussan, OSB and Vocation Director from St. Mary Monastery in Rock

Island, Illinois, were the DAVA co-chairs for the event. “Our goal was to promote a greater awareness of religious life and the priesthood for 6<sup>th</sup> graders in the Dubuque County Catholic Schools,” says Bussan. “We think having this event on an annual basis assists the teachers in promoting the understanding of vocation that comes from our Baptism.” Throughout the day, eleven Catholic men’s and women’s religious groups gave individual presentations in different classrooms. Two diocesan priesthood sessions were also offered.

DWC students Frt. Alejandro Hernandez Mumenthey, SVD, and Sr. Ana Julita Bela Bau, SSpS, gave presentations about the Society of the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters. Though Mumenthey was nervous about speaking to a group, he says, “Those kids were smiling and paying attention, even helping me with my English! I felt happy because my experience helped them understand and respect other cultures and ways of thinking – making them aware of the mission of the SVD in the world.” He adds, “My vocation is an invitation to give myself to God and to build an authentic, useful life for me and for Him.”

A celebration of the Eucharist concluded the afternoon sessions, gathering the students back in the chapel where their day had begun. “An event like this gets young students thinking about how God may be calling them. It fosters questions about what God might have planned for them,” says Uhal. “And it plants the seed of possibility, enhancing the exploration of a religious vocation as a Sister, Brother, deacon or priest.”

## 6th Grade Vocation Awareness Day